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ABSTRACT

The paper examines issues involving the implementation of P.L. 94-142, The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, with minority group students. A critique of studies on minority concerns is presented, and such assessment issues as technical problems and the implications of ability grouping for minorities, are explored. Considerations in evaluating mainstream programs for minority students are analyzed, and suggestions are made to involve minority group teachers, administrators, and scholars in the conceptualization of evaluation efforts, and to pay special attention to the percentages of minority group children in segregated classes. (CL)

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Public Law 94-142 and The Minority Retarded Child: An Overview of Issues and Practices

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Abstract: A variety of Issues and Practices pertinent to implementation of Public Law 94-142 for minority group children are presented, including: (a) a critique of studies unique to minority group concerns, with emphasis upon the insights they yield for improved instructional designs; (b) Issues in assessment of minority group children; and (c) Evaluating mainstream programs for minority children within the context of Public Law 94-142. The paper concludes with strategies for compliance with the least restrictive environment, and the observation that problems and issues related to program alternatives for minority group children are not insurmountable.

Public Law 94-142 and The Minority Retarded Child: An Overview of Issues and Practices

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Significant concerns have recently been articulated in regards to the education of the minority retarded child (Gottlieb, Agard, Kaufman, & Semmel, 1976; Grant & Renzulli, 1975; Jones, 1976; Jones & Wilderson, 1976). Several facts help to explain why this is so. First, the efficacy studies have demonstrated that special classes and other stigmatizing educational arrangements provide an atmosphere that is educationally and morally unjust. Second, there has been an increasing concern with the effects of labeling and the misclassification of children from minority backgrounds as mentally retarded. Third, recent Federal Legislation (PL 94-142, 1975) and state Due Process regulations mandate that handicapped children be educated with their nonhandicapped peers in the least restrictive environment (Abeson, Bolick, & Hass, 1975; Ballard & Zettel, 1977; Hayes & Higgins, 1978; Hudson & Graham, 1978).

With the enactment of Public Law 94-142, mainstreaming, or attempting to educate most children in regular classrooms has received serious consideration throughout the profession. The new law requires federal, state, and local officials to provide programs and data on the number of children served;

that is, number of children mainstreamed, number removed from self contained classes, decrease in the number of minority group children in self contained classes, and so forth. While this information has its purposes and is easily obtained, it is also among the most useless, primarily because of issues that it does not address, for example, the appropriateness of the alternative educational placement and resulting improvement (or lack of it) in social adjustment, academic achievement, and other outcomes presumed to accompany mainstream placement. It is important, therefore, as new programs are developed and before inplementation becomes finalized, that a variety of issues related to mainstreaming minority group children be considered. The purpose of this paper is to present issues and practices relevant to the demands of Public Law 94-142, with special attention given to concerns unique to activities involving minority retarded children.

Critique of Studies on Minority Concerns

The negative effect of various labels on the minority child has been a source of serious concern (Jones, 1972). At issue is the belief that many special education labels are stigmatizing, affect negatively children's self-concepts, and doubly penalize minority group children who are discriminated against by virture of their racial or ethnic identity and who must endure a stigmatizing label as well. Additional studies have reported evidence of the distaste

and embarrassment felt by the impact of labels (e.g., Hobbs, 1975; MacMillan, Jones, & Aloia, 1974). This should be sufficient to justify the concern which has been expressed by minority members.

Public law 94-142 represents the standards that have over the past several years been laid down by the courts, legislatures, and other policy bodies of our country. In keeping with the provisions of the new law, there can be no general argument convincing enough to set mainstreaming aside. It is sound in ideology, its political-economic basis is frugal, and its methological techniques seem pedagogically sound. However, it has little accountability to the children it serves (Johnson, 1976). Thus, we must, where minority children are concerned, be extremely cautious until there is much more clarity in the expert opinions which seek to verify its utility and until there is significant documentation of its effect upon the lives of our children.

Kendall (1977) investigated the effect of reintegration on reading achievement and self-concept of three groups of retarded children. Results indicated that reading achievement and self-concept of segregated and integrated EMR children was lower than that of regular class EMR children. The results of this investigation seem to have serious implications for minority children, who in many instances have damaged self-concepts. It is necessary for the minority child,

as well as other children, to establish a positive self-concept, which is at least casually related to achievement.

Issues in Assessment of Minority Group Children

The fundamental issue in the testing of minority group children spring from the persistent and undeniable fact that there exists a difference between minority group test scores and white Anglo Saxon test scores (Samuda, 1976). Minority groups repeatedly fall at one standard deviation below the mean score of whites, especially on tests which purport to measure levels of intellectual fuctioning.

An understanding of the problems and issues of testing, especially when related to minorities, requires some elaboration of the opposing views and theories of the nature-nurture controversy (Cancro, 1971). Thus, to gain proper appreciation of the effects and implications of testing, it is necessary to view the interpretations of the fact of one standard deviation difference in proper context.

An examination of the technical problems in the appraisal of the test performances of minority group children and the issues and fallacies that flow from interpretations of the difference between the average performance of majority and minority group individuals are not mere academic exercises. The implications and consequencies of testing for minority group individuals are real, drastic, and pervasive in their effects at all levels and stages in the lives of minority

individuals. Such far reaching consequencies are apparent in the labeling of minority group children as mentally retarded, and in the process of grouping and placement of such children.

Ability grouping for minorities, inevitably leads to ethnic and socioeconomic separation, thus to racial imbalance in the classroom and the perceived "inherent intellectual inferiority" of blacks in particular. Standardized tests of intelligence, are used to stratify students in terms of estimated potential, which stratification leads to labeling and the consequent effect of lowered self-concept and other related matters as well as to inflated myths and stereotypes and lowered expectations of teachers, which in turn leads to poor learning conditions and the inevitable inferior performance of those students on tests of achievement.

Coleman (1966) and Dunn (1968) showed that at the national level minorities comprise more than 50 percent of those classified as mentally retarded. In an intense study conducted in one school district, Mercer (1973) dramatically illustrated the way test scores conspire to cause the exaggerated mislabeling of minority group children. Mercer's 8-year study of mental retardation, showed that of the children studied (predominantly Mexican American and black) 75 percent of those classified as mentally retarded had been mislabeled and incorrectly placed. Mercer's contention is

that so-called intelligence tests as presently used mirror the standards, values, and experiences of the white Anglo Saxon middle class only. Consequently, when those tests were used with populations that do not correspond to the norm, there were four times more Mexican Americans and three times as many blacks in classes for the retarded as would have been expected.

In order to consider what is needed in the way of procedures to effectively assess black students for mainstream placement, we must first examine present assessment procedures and their appropriateness for providing an accurate assessment of black children (Dent, 1976). Recognizing the shortcomings of existing assessment procedures and the fact that no existing test or conceivable battery of existing psychological instruments can provide the needed information, I suggest there are some unique elements which an effective system of assessment can be erected for minority group children:

1. The assessment must provide accurate information concerning the student's present level of cognitive functioning within the contex of his cultural background and experience.
2. Assessment must identify the specific educational needs of the individual rather than focus on inferred intellectual deficits.

3. The assessment must be a continuous process.
4. The assessment must focus on the strenghts which the student brings to the academic situation which can form the foundation for new skills development.
5. School personnel must gain a thorough understanding of the above stated issues, if assessment for placement and appropriate pedagogical treatment, according to Public Law 94-142, is to have the slightest chance for yielding benefits for minority students.

Evaluation Within the Contex of Public Law 94-142

Evaluation is a key feature of Public law 94-142. Section 618 of the Act is devoted specifically to evaluation. The point of emphasis is that, objectives should be specified, the means to achieve those objectives outlined, and the instruments and measures by which we gauge our success should be identified. I believe that the latter activity will present a challenge because we will learn that the proper instruments are really not available. But I think we need to be sensitive to such problems, for we are being forced to evaluate kinds of programs with instruments that neither measure our success nor show appropriate sensitivity to the tough methological problems that remain unsolved.

It should be clear that there is no such thing as evaluating mainstreaming. Mainstream programs are quite diverse. Some will be concerned with minority group children specifically,

others will be designed for caucasian children in rural areas, yet others will be designed for children without any concern for racial designation. The most important point is that we need information about what goes on in least restrictive environments (Jones, Gottlieb, Guskin, & Yoshida, 1978).

There is a critical need to realize that mainstream students are diverse. Not only do they vary on racial characteristics, but they vary on social class characteristics, and they also vary with respect to whether they have had a special class experience, or have not had such an experience. There is reason to believe that these different kinds of students should be taken into account as we begin to evaluate mainstream programs. One of the very difficult problems that we get into, and is one that can be avoided, is that often we contribute characteristics to race that might be due to social class. It is called a so called race and social class confounding. There is an error which is perpentrated and repeated and it is simply where we compare lower socio-economic status minority group children with middle class caucasian children. That is something that should be avoided, but which is not, and causes us to contribute many things to race that should not be contributed.

Attention should be paid to the reality that evaluation activities will be different for different audiences. But we need to remember that in part, mainstreaming developed out of

the concerns of minority groups, with the belief that: (a) Minority group children were not receiving a good education in the segregated special classes, (b) that they were stigmatized in such classes and, (c) with the consequence that their self was impaired, their achievement below average, their preparation for the future inadequate. And so if we are going to evaluate mainstream programs, we should look at these areas:

1. The proportion of minority group children relative to caucasians in the different educational arrangements.
2. The appropriateness of their placement.
3. The impact of their placement on achievement, attitudes, self-esteem, and related matters.

I would like to address a few additional concerns that are unique to the evaluation of the impact of Public Law 94-142 on minority group children. My first suggestion is that minority group teachers, administrators, and scholars need to be involved in the conceptualization and execution of evaluation activities. Particularly, in programs where there is concern about the impact of mainstreaming on minority group children. And I note that our insights can be very valuable here.

My second suggestion is that there should be serious concern about the percentages of minority group children in

segregated classes. However, we cannot be satisfied with mere removal from the segregated special class, but must also be concerned with the appropriateness of any subsequent placement. The least restrictive alternative suggests that some minority children may need self contained classes. However, we must be alert to the increase of enrollment in classes for learning disabled children who were formerly in classes for the EMR. The substitution of one segregated setting for another may be harmful (Jones, 1977).

Purposes and Related Activities

The specific purposes stated by Public Law 94-142 are fourfold: (1) to insure that all handicapped children have public funded special education and related services made available to them, (2) to insure the rights of handicapped children and their parents and guardians, (3) to relieve the financial burden placed on state and local governments to accomplish the above mentioned purposes and (4) to assess and insure the effectiveness of efforts to educate handicapped children. To accomplish these objectives, organizational renewal strategies must be developed and schools viewed as open social systems where the least restrictive environment is seen as a positive development for all children.

Concluding Remarks

This paper has attempted to present a variety of issues and practices related to compliance with the provisions of

Public Law 94-142. It should be apparent from the foregoing analyses that problems related to the mainstreaming of minority group children are not insurmountable. By giving attention to matters addressed, many pitfalls characterizing previous special education innovations can be avoided, and it will become possible to integrate minority children according to recent federal mandates and, in time, know the effectiveness of our efforts.

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